



# IAC Success Story

Christchurch Welcomes World Climate  
Change Adaptation Conference



## THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL ADAPTATION FUTURES CONFERENCE

- Ōtautahi Christchurch, New Zealand
- October 2025
- Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre
- 2000 delegates from 80 countries (300 online)

In October 2025, Ōtautahi Christchurch, New Zealand, hosted the 8th International Adaptation Futures Conference (AF2025), the world's premier international climate change adaptation conference and the flagship event of the United Nations World Adaptation Science Programme (WASP).

The event brought together 2000 researchers, scientists, policymakers, and practitioners from around 80 countries to accelerate solutions that protect communities, economies, and environments from climate impacts.

Co-hosted by WASP and the University of Canterbury Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha, AF2025 featured more than 200 sessions across four days of knowledge sharing and inspiration to advance innovative and inclusive climate adaptation.

## WHY WAS CHRISTCHURCH A FITTING HOST FOR THE CONFERENCE?

Christchurch was a fitting host for both its conference infrastructure and accessibility, and its blend of heritage, innovation, and local knowledge.

AF2025 co-convenor Distinguished Professor Steven Ratuva of the University of Canterbury said: "It highlights New Zealand's capacity, knowledge, and will to engage with adaptation. We have the University of Canterbury here, which is full of experts in the area of climate science, the area of adaptation, the area of resilience."



The ethos of the conference was reflected in the choice of main conference venue: Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre is a certified Toitū Net Carbon Zero venue with a broad range of sustainability initiatives to reduce waste and prioritise local sourcing. Its high-tech capabilities enabled AF2025 to model low carbon impact by offering both in-person and virtual participation, with around one in seven delegates joining online.

Additional transport emissions were avoided by Christchurch’s walkability. Te Pae is within easy walking distance of hotel providers, restaurants and activities in the city centre, plus other venues in the programme including Christchurch Town Hall, The Piano Centre, Christchurch Art Gallery, and Tūranga Library.

AF2025 co-convenor Professor Bronwyn Hayward of the University of Canterbury added: “It’s been really exciting to be able to bring Adaptation Futures 2025 to Ōtautahi Christchurch. It’s also been fantastic to be able to do it in a venue, in a place that is walkable, that is green, that encourages sustainability and that actually allows us to work both person to person but also online.”

A range of Living Labs continued the learning outside the convention centre, with field-based experiences connecting global adaptation strategies with local action across the Waitaha Canterbury region, including coastal hazard planning, urban regeneration, Marae-based innovation, and sustainable farming.

## **THE CONFERENCE FACILITATED INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**

Hosting the event in New Zealand for the first time also provided an opportunity to focus on climate impact in the Pacific, with an emphasis on locally led solutions and Indigenous leadership.



Both Professor Steven Ratuva and Ngāi Tahu leader Lisa Tumahai were on the conference's steering committee, influencing themes and content.

Tumahai led a pre-conference Indigenous leadership wānanga (forum), which brought together more than 300 participants from Aotearoa, the Pacific, Canada, and Africa to create space and time for Indigenous conversations and establish an Indigenous Adaptation Network.

"I think the outcomes and the richness of work feeding through to a work plan is an amazing bonus from this particular conference," she said.

Indigenous leadership was also carried throughout the programme, with mana whenua Ngāi Tūāhuriri welcoming visitors with a traditional mihi whakatau, and MC Miriama Kamo (Ngāi Tahu/Ngāti Mutunga) overseeing proceedings. Keynote speakers included Minister Dr Maina Vakafua Talia, Tuvalu's Minister for Climate Change; and Cynthia Houniuhi, President of Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change. In addition, one of the Living Labs, the Te Kori a te Kō field trip to Ōnuku Marae, showcased Indigenous-led approaches to climate change adaptation and connection between mātauranga Māori (knowledge) and Western science.

Senior UN representative and WASP Chair Chizuru Aoki said: "Having this conference in New Zealand really enabled us to have much more robust engagement with Pacific neighbours... and the very robust engagement of Māori leaders sends inclusive, important signals on how adaptation should be dealt with across society.

"New Zealand has a lot to offer in terms of how you work with Indigenous communities and integrate decision-making across the whole of society. That is very unique and something the world can learn from."



## HOW THE CONFERENCE BUILT A LONG-TERM LEGACY

Christchurch benefited far beyond the estimated \$2.5M economic impact to local businesses from visitors attending the conference.

The Ōtautahi Christchurch Adaptation Challenge will deliver a significant long-term legacy for the city. Building on the conference's early career workshop, it calls on interdisciplinary teams of early career researchers from around the world to provide solutions to tackle some of Christchurch's most pressing climate adaptation issues. The Chairs of Adaptation Futures 2025 alongside a representative of Christchurch NZ and the city Adaptation team, will select the best solutions which will be showcased in Christchurch later this year.

AF2025 also provided local academic and research communities with significant opportunities to showcase their research and forge new collaborations.

University of Canterbury's Janik Haas noted: "We have a rich ecosystem—engineering schools, manufacturing industry, and sustainability leadership. We had many fruitful conversations with international colleagues in terms of joint publication ideas, and research project proposals."

Local businesses focused on climate-positive technology and innovation were also showcased in the conference's exhibition area, gaining valuable exposure, connections, and access to a global audience. Startups included:

- KiwiFibre, which creates regenerative fibre composite materials from the native harakeke plant
- Aspiring Materials, a cleantech company developing a process to capture carbon dioxide emissions using an abundant rock called olivine
- Seismic Shift, whose smart building technologies improve earthquake resilience while reducing construction waste sent to landfill.



The Art of Climate Conversation, a series of public outreach performances, art exhibitions and workshops, also took place alongside AF2025. Partnerships with the Christchurch Art Gallery (Te Puna o Waiwhetū), Atamira Dance Company, Creative New Zealand, Fale Eke gallery and Te Pūtahi Centre for Architecture and City Making showcased what Christchurch has learned about community recovery and extended the power of storytelling throughout the wider community.

Hayward added: “There is a sense here in Ōtautahi Christchurch that the city is really flourishing, that this is a place where we can host big conversations and people want that to happen and that's been really rewarding.”

## HOW COLLABORATION CONTRIBUTED TO CONFERENCE DELIVERY

Partnership between co-hosts The World Adaptation Science Programme and University of Canterbury, alongside support from ChristchurchNZ, Tourism New Zealand Business Events, PCO The Conference Company, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre, The Adaptation Fund as foundation sponsor, and a team of national and international sponsors facilitated the smooth delivery of a complex event for a large number of people.

Hayward notes: “Mounting a large international event is quite daunting and we wouldn't have been able to do it without ChristchurchNZ and Tourism New Zealand helping us navigate. It's been a very special experience...It is truly a team and a city effort.’

Aoki concludes: “This has been a fantastic success. There is very very good momentum, good enthusiasm, and solidarity among the so many partners on climate adaptation.”

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